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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2537  
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 8171  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0347  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ APR 9402  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 6165  
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 1615  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 6816  
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 4414

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SUBJECT: AFRO-COLOMBIAN COMMISSION TO BEGIN WORK ON MAY 21

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. The GOC will announce the official launch of work by the Commission for Advancement of Afro-Colombians on Afro-Colombian Day, May 21. Commission Executive Director Oscar Gamboa said the launch was delayed due to the perception of some Afro-Colombian communities that they did not have adequate representation in the body. Gamboa said the GOC increased the number of voting members to address these concerns. The Commission will make recommendations to the GOC and will include three stages: 1) a university study on Afro-Colombians' socio-economic status, 2) working groups on human rights, land, development and social issues, and 3) the reporting, tracking and evaluation of progress. END SUMMARY.

¶2. The GOC will announce the official launch of the Commission for Advancement of Afro-Colombians on Afro-Colombian Day, May 21 -- the day slavery was abolished in Colombia in 1851. Commission Executive Director Oscar Gamboa said the launch--originally planned for February--was delayed due to some Afro-Colombian communities' perception that they did not have adequate representation on the body. Gamboa noted that the Afro-Colombian community is very divided, with many Afro-Colombia political leaders perceived as corrupt. He said the GOC consulted widely with different community groups and altered the Commission's rules to increase the number of voting members to address the diversity concern.

¶3. Gamboa said the Commission will make policy recommendations to the GOC and will involve three stages: 1) a university study on Afro-Colombians' socio-economic status, 2) working groups on human rights, land, development and social issues, and 3) the reporting, tracking and evaluation of progress. The University of the Andes has already begun work on the socio-economic study, which will identify the challenges facing the Afro-Colombian community. The first results of the study are set to be published in May.

¶4. Gamboa said the Commission plans to include in the study a section on the African-American movement in the United States. He voiced hope that the honorary members of the Commission from the United States, including Congressman Gregory Meeks and other members of the Afro-American Caucus, would share their perspectives with the Commission. He said the Commission has invited Jesse Jackson to attend the launch.

¶5. Gamboa said each working group will coordinate its

activities with the corresponding ministry. He envisions inviting more civic and other groups, including members of the clergy, military, chamber of commerce and grassroots leaders, to participate. The working groups will travel to 12 different cities to hear national, regional and local perspectives on the issues. The working groups will report to the Commission every two months. The Commission will make policy recommendations to the GOC and will also monitor progress. The GOC set up the Commission for a year, but Gamboa expects it to be extended.

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